

## **GRIEF SUPPORT**

Grief is unique- people experience grief in very unique ways- men/ women, children/ adults, those who have had previous experiences with grief and those who have not. We should not suppose that a crew or individual would have the same reaction to an incident.

“Sometimes you stuff your grief so much you can’t sigh.”

Grief and mourning are two separate things. Grief is the personal response. Mourning is the public response- how I show myself to other when I grieve. It may appear that someone seems stoic to the situation because they are not openly being emotional. However, it may be that the person is experiencing very profound grief. Understand this and explain it to those who wonder how someone could be so ‘detached’. People may grieve but they don’t know how or want to mourn.

“Tears are liquid emotion.”

Grief can cause physical reactions similar to stress. These are normal. Reassure the grieving person that they are not going ‘crazy’- they are just ‘being human’. Some symptoms include: extreme fatigue, loss of appetite, sleeplessness, heavy sighing, empty hollow feeling in the stomach, heart aches, difficulty concentrating, forgetfulness, sense of confusion, sensitivity to noise, dry mouth, throat, skin (caused by dehydration), sense of unreality and feeling that life has lost its interest and meaning. Reassure the grieving person that these symptoms are normal and will fade with time.

“Grief that has not had tears will make other organs weep”.

An HRSP can help support the grieving person in providing a private place to be, healthy food, a telephone and time for sleep. Also, your presence, if requested, should be made available. “When you can’t fix it, you can still help a person cry.” Many times grief may need a healthy expression. This can be in the form of physical activity, writing a letter to the person/don’t send it, scream in a pillow or by creating a ritual or small shrine. For many, spirituality is incredibly important during grieving. Make clergy available if requested. Provide that quiet place for prayer.

In some circumstances, grieving may be accompanied by anger and guilt. “If only....” There may be much unfinished business with that person. Understand that

these underlying emotions can be VERY strong and can influence those individual responses. Guilt is what we feel when we purposefully commit an act. Regret is the ‘wisdom of hindsight.” Sometimes a person may want to hold on to their regrets. Let them- don’t try to rescue them. Time will help them forgive themselves.

Listen. Listen. Listen. Listen. Listen. Allow tears and laughter. Don’t try to take the pain away. Big decisions can wait. Be a friend. These phrases may help- ‘I have no idea what this is like for you’ ‘It must be hard to accept’, ‘you must have been close’. Phrases that don’t help- “Time will heal’, its God’s will’, I know how you feel’, There must have been a reason’.

Be there. Ask what is needed and try to provide it. As the HRSP, you may be asked to be the support, the connection and the conduit. Be flexible, be human and as needed, create your own support process to defuse from the experience.

S. Hakanson – Thanks to Kelly Osmont, “What Can I Say” Guide to Grieving.